

Claim(s)

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1. A pre-paid airline ticket comprising a record of an advance-purchase of an airline ticket for a fixed price that may be used by a customer to book a flight, the pre-paid airline ticket including an identifier, the identifier uniquely identifying the pre-paid airline ticket, and, associated with the identifier, a plurality of geographic flight parameters and a plurality of non-geographic flight parameters, at least one of the plurality of geographic flight parameters being an unspecified geographic flight parameter.

2. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 wherein the identifier comprises an alpha-numeric sequence.

3. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 wherein the plurality of non-geographic flight parameters comprise a date, a time, a flight number, and a seat.

4. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 wherein the plurality of non-geographic flight parameters further comprise one or more unspecified non-geographic flight parameters.

5. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 4 wherein the one or more unspecified non-geographic flight parameters comprise a range of possible values from which the one or more unspecified non-geographic flight parameters may be selected.

6. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 wherein the plurality of geographic flight parameters comprise a departure location and a destination.

7. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 further comprising a dependence between two or more of the plurality of geographic flight parameters.

8. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 7 wherein the dependence comprises a

maximum distance between the destination and the departure location.

9. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 7 wherein the dependence comprises a geographical region from which the departure location and the destination must be selected.

10. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 7 wherein the dependence comprises a geographical region from which the departure location must be selected for a specified destination.

11. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 7 wherein the dependence comprises a geographical region from which the destination must be selected for a specified departure location.

12. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 further comprising a wallet-sized card, the wallet-sized card including a magnetic strip, the magnetic strip comprising an encoded representation of the unique identifier.

13. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 further comprising a wallet-sized card, the wallet-sized card including a bar code, the bar code comprising an encoded representation of the unique identifier.

14. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 further comprising a printed receipt, the printed receipt including a first part for presentation to an airline and a second part for a customer's records, the printed receipt including, in printed form, the unique identifier, the plurality of non-geographic flight parameters, and the plurality of geographic flight parameters.

15. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 further comprising an electronic receipt, the electronic receipt including, in electronic form, the unique identifier.

16. The pre-paid airline ticket of claim 1 further comprising an email receipt, the email receipt including, in electronic form, the unique identifier.

17. A network server for selling pre-paid airline tickets, the server comprising:

a processor and a storage device, the storage device configured to store one or more ticket options, each ticket option comprising an identifier, the identifier uniquely identifying the ticket option, a price, a plurality of geographic flight parameters, and a plurality of non-geographic flight parameters, at least one of the plurality of geographic flight parameters being an unspecified geographic flight parameter;

a secure connection to one or more customers, wherein the processor is connected in a communicating relationship with one or more customers;

the processor configured to provide an interactive user interface to the one or more customers, the interface including a presentation of the one or more ticket options, the processor further configured to receive an order from one of the one or more customers for a particular one of the one or more ticket options; and the processor further configured to provide the identifier of the particular one of the one or more ticket options to the one the one or more customers when that customer orders a pre-paid airline ticket.

18. The network server of claim 17 further comprising a secure connection to one or more airline servers, wherein the processor is connected in a communicating relationship with the one or more airline servers, the processor configured to retrieve new ticket options from the one or more airline servers and store the new ticket options in the storage device.

19. The network server of claim 18 wherein the processor is configured to retrieve new ticket options from the one or more airline servers on a real-time basis.

20. The network server of claim 17 further comprising a secure connection to one or more financial transaction servers, wherein the processor is connected in a communicating relationship with the one or more financial transaction servers, the

processor configured to complete a financial transaction through one of the one or more financial transaction servers for one of the one or more customers when that customer orders a pre-paid airline ticket.

21. The network server of claim 17 further comprising a secure connection to one or more remote ticket vendors, wherein the processor is connected in a communicating relationship with the one or more remote vendors, the processor configured to provide each of the remote vendors with one or more ticket options, whereby each of the remote vendors may resell one or more pre-paid airline tickets.

22. The network server of claim 17 wherein the network server is a World Wide Web server.

23. The network server of claim 17, the secure connection to one or more customers further comprising a secure Internet connection.

24. The network server of claim 17 wherein the processor is further configured to receive a unique identifier from a pre-paid ticket holder, present qualifying flight and seat information to the pre-paid ticket holder, receive a booking request from the pre-paid ticket holder, and provide a booking confirmation to the pre-paid ticket holder.

25. The network server of claim 17 wherein the processor is further configured to obtain seat availability information from an airline server and to provide the seat availability information to a pre-paid ticket holder.

26. The network server of claim 17, the storage device comprising a mass storage device.

27. The network server of claim 17 wherein the processor is further configured to provide an electronic bulletin board for reselling a plurality of pre-paid airline tickets.

28. A system for providing pre-paid airline tickets comprising:
- means for storing a plurality of ticket options, each ticket option comprising a ticket price, a plurality of geographic flight parameters, and a plurality of non-geographic flight parameters, at least one of the plurality of geographic flight parameters being an unspecified geographic flight parameter;
 - means for presenting the plurality of ticket options to a customer;
 - means for receiving a ticket selection from the customer;
 - means for receiving a payment from the customer, the payment being equal to the ticket price;
 - means for associating with the selected ticket option a unique identifier;
 - means for storing the unique identifier and the associated ticket option; and
 - means for providing a pre-paid airline ticket to the customer, the pre-paid airline ticket comprising a record of the unique identifier.
29. The system of claim 28 further comprising means for booking a flight using the pre-paid airline ticket.
30. The system of claim 29 wherein the flight booking means further comprises a means for interactively booking a flight over the World Wide Web.
31. The system of claim 28 further comprising a means for periodically updating the ticket option storing means from a remote airline server.
32. The system of claim 28 further comprising a means for securely communicating with a remote financial transaction server to perform a transfer of funds for the customer.
33. The system of claim 28 further comprising a means for reselling a plurality of pre-paid airline tickets.

34. A method for providing pre-paid airline tickets comprising:
- storing a plurality of ticket options in a ticket option database, each ticket option comprising a ticket price and a plurality of flight parameters, at least one of the plurality of flight parameters being an unspecified flight parameter;
 - presenting the ticket options to a customer;
 - receiving a ticket selection from the customer;
 - receiving a payment from the customer, the payment being equal to the ticket price;
 - associating a unique identifier with the selected ticket option;
 - storing the unique identifier and the associated ticket option; and
 - providing a pre-paid airline ticket to the customer, the pre-paid airline ticket comprising a record of the unique identifier and a record of one or more of the plurality of flight parameters.
35. The method of claim 34 further comprising booking a flight using the pre-paid airline ticket.
36. The method of claim 35 wherein booking a flight is performed interactively using the World Wide Web.
37. The method of claim 34 further comprising periodically updating the ticket option database from a remote airline server.
38. The method of claim 34 wherein receiving a payment from the customer further comprises transferring funds for the customer using a remote financial transaction server.
39. The method of claim 34 wherein providing a pre-paid airline ticket further comprises generating a wallet-sized card with the unique identifier encoded in a magnetic strip.

40. The method of claim 34 wherein providing a pre-paid airline ticket further comprises generating a wallet-sized card with the unique identifier encoded in a bar code.

41. The method of claim 34 wherein providing a pre-paid airline ticket further comprises generating a printed receipt, the printed receipt including a first part for presentation to an airline and a second part for the customer's records, the printed receipt including, in printed form, the unique identifier and the plurality of flight parameters.

42. The method of claim 1 wherein a plurality of pre-paid airline tickets are provided to a wholesale customer, the wholesale customer further reselling one or more of the pre-paid airline tickets to a retail customer.

43. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an electronic bulletin board where a plurality of customers resell pre-paid airline tickets.

44. A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium for providing pre-paid airline tickets using a pre-paid ticket identifier database, the database comprising a plurality of records, each record including a plurality of fields, the plurality of fields comprising:

an identifier field, the identifier field including an identifier that uniquely identifies a pre-paid airline ticket; and

a plurality of geographic flight parameter fields and a plurality of non-geographic flight parameter fields, at least one of the plurality of geographic flight parameter fields including an unspecified geographic flight parameter.

45. The computer program of claim 44 wherein the identifier included in the identifier field comprises an alpha-numeric sequence.

46. The computer program of claim 44 wherein the plurality of non-geographic flight parameter fields include a restrictions field, the restrictions field including any restrictions

on use of an associated pre-paid airline ticket.

47. The computer program of claim 44 wherein the unspecified geographic flight parameter comprises a plurality of choices from which the unspecified geographic flight parameter may be specified.

48. The computer program of claim 44 wherein the plurality of geographic flight parameter fields include an allowed destinations field and an allowed departures field.

49. The computer program of claim 44 wherein the plurality of geographic flight parameter fields includes a region field, the region field providing information which establishes a dependence between an allowed destinations field and an allowed departures field.

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B4